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THE CONSTRUCTION OF A TEACHER-RATING SCALE

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In any system of schools which employs many teachers, a teacher-rating scale is a necessity, whether or not we know how to construct such a scale in a scientific way. Those smaller school systems which have but one position of a kind can reward greater efficiency by paying for the position or by some other subterfuge. As soon as several or many positions of the same kind become necessary in a system the unfairness of paying for "position" becomes manifest. Not all the teachers filling like positions are equally effective, and a rating system is the only way by which the difference in efficiency can be recognized and appropriately rewarded.

Also, the teacher who has taught a year or two knows that her services are worth more after that experience than they were at first. She justly expects recognition of that increased worth in larger pay. It is generally admitted that she is entitled to the increase. How shall its amount be determined? Shall it begin after the first year of teaching? Shall such increase be the same amount for all teachers having had the same length of experience, or shall it be proportioned according to certain variable properties or qualities of the teaching effort? No one who has had experience in administering the affairs of a school system doubts the need of a scale or graduated plan according to which varying degrees of teaching ability can be recognized, measured, and approximately rewarded. Adjustment on an individual basis for each teacher of a large system, even if desirable, is impossible in practice. Hence whether or not we know just how to make an ideally perfect scale, we shall have to use such scales as we can devise until experience reveals the kind that serves our purpose best.

The dissatisfaction resulting from the use of rating scales must not be regarded as proof that construction of satisfactory scales is

not possible. Through experience we shall learn to cope with the perplexity which arises when two or more judges rate the same teacher on a given quality and differ in the rating assigned. The teacher very properly asks, "Which judge is right?" and demands a method which does not show such inconsistencies. Experience will also teach us how to avoid attempts to judge uncertain, unrecognizable, and unmeasurable values. Single qualities which are easily and certainly recognizable, and which can be compared on a commensurable basis, are surely a necessity in a rating scale that is to win the confidence of teachers and of those who are charged with the duty of rating teachers. Very brief experience with the application of a rating scale makes these points unmistakably clear.

In such efforts as have been made to construct a scale of this type, a basis of measuring and comparing the value of different abilities or qualities has proved difficult to find. In the early efforts to develop scales, a number was usually arbitrarily assigned to each of a series of expressions of value. For example: excellent might be equivalent to 5, satisfactory having a value of 4, etc. The effort to rate or grade a teacher by such a scale encounters great difficulties. If the superintendent and principal evaluate the same qualities, one may rate as 4 what the other rates as 5. The teacher has trouble in understanding just why any item of the list of either judge is 4 or 5. Had she judged herself she might have agreed more readily if some of the 4's had been 5's and some of the 5's had been 4's. That is, she cannot understand just how either set of values has been arrived at, unless it expresses the mere opinion or impression of the judge. To insure the teacher's assent and confidence, the value assigned by the judge must be arrived at by some procedure which the teacher can check up for herself.

To the scale¹ proposed in the May, 1920, issue of the *Elementary School Journal*, there is the objection that it is almost impossible of construction by any teacher, and when constructed will represent a different scale for each individual. What is needed is a

¹ H. O. Rugg, "Self-Improvement of Teachers through Self-Rating: A New Scale for Rating Teachers' Efficiency," *Elementary School Journal*, XX (May, 1920), 670-84.

unit of value which will serve as the yardstick serves in measuring length, and which will win universal recognition because of its fitness for measurement of its kind of values. It must be said for Professor Rugg's proposal that it recognizes the difficulties of a variable and unidentifiable unit and attempts an approximation to a standard value.

While Professor Rugg's scheme is intended to help teachers to judge themselves, he is just as definitely showing to superintendents and supervisors a method for the construction of a scale that may be of real service in the work of constructive supervision. It is extremely important, as has been suggested, that whatever such device is employed in supervision shall have the respect and confidence of the teachers who are thus rated. A rating scale that depends upon authority for the acceptance of its judgments is sure of a short and troubled existence. Values as enumerated in the rating scale must be as readily recognizable and identifiable by the teacher as by the one who exercises judgment. This fact is so vitally important that reiteration is fully warranted.

One other fault of Professor Rugg's scale may be mentioned. The items of every teacher-rating scale should be definite, single, and separable when recording a judgment on a given point. For instance, in his first division of general values, Professor Rugg asks as his second question, "Does he [the teacher] relate lessons to material in other fields and use illustrations outside his own subject (e.g., mathematics and science)?" The "and" discloses the weakness: two separable qualities of good instruction are linked as one question. The answer might be "yes," with respect to one of these practices and for the other "no." To be of real value in correction of a fault, to enable the teacher to interpret the suggestion of the judge, it should be made clear to which part of the question the judge's criticism is meant to apply. If she is left in doubt about the matter, she has not been helped to improve her teaching. That is, since both qualities are needed, they should appear in the scale as separate items. Then "yes" or "no" will be possible for either quality independent of the other. The teacher will then be clearly shown which quality is rated low and which is rated high.

To the extent that Professor Rugg's article induces teachers to become self-critical, he has rendered a service of inestimable value to the profession and especially to the cause of teacher-rating. Teachers who have been induced to assume a critical and questioning attitude toward their own work are in the direct way to appreciate supervision and to profit by constructive criticism. When teachers begin to feel dissatisfaction with their own efforts, they are likely to develop a ready acquiescence with intelligent and sympathetic supervision. Hence it is due Professor Rugg to say that he has developed a very forceful argument for both self-supervision and for official supervision.

Since I have presumed to question the scale proposed by Professor Rugg, it is incumbent upon me to propose an alternative which I think is better.

The entire process of supervision becomes effective through "suggestion." If a teacher's work is not satisfactory to a supervisor, it becomes the supervisor's duty and opportunity to suggest improvement. If the teacher is criticizing her own work and feels dissatisfied, she will seek help and suggestions from other teachers, from books, and from educational journals. Self-supervision can be readily measured in terms of need of suggestions, search for suggestions, and use of suggestions received. So also can supervision by a special supervisory officer measure need for suggestions, request for suggestions, and acceptance of suggestions. This idea is perhaps new enough to require some meditation to see its force. However, as compared with the intricate devices generally proposed as a basis for the assignment of values to the items of a rating scale, this proposal is very simple: *Evaluate every item of the chosen rating scale according to the teacher's need for suggestions, search for suggestions, and use of suggestions for that item.*

In applying this unit of measure, present rating scales may be used or an entirely new scale may be arranged. After the items of the scale, whether fifteen or fifty in number, have been chosen, it will be arranged between teachers and supervisors that the range of values for each item shall be from 1 to 5. Thus, 5 will mean that the teacher needs no suggestions on the point under consideration, always asks for suggestions, and can often give

suggestions to other teachers or to the supervisor; 4 will mean that the teacher rarely needs suggestions, often asks for them, and adopts those appropriate to her needs; 3 will indicate that the teacher needs suggestions very often, but rarely or never asks for them, and infrequently makes use of those offered; 2 will indicate that the teacher cannot get along without suggestions, yet rarely succeeds in using any of them; 1 will mean that the teacher can do nothing without suggestions and does nothing with suggestions. Finer shadings along the line are possible if the scale be graduated from 10 to 1.

Every mark given to a teacher according to such a scale will be clear and significant to the teacher whether she marks herself or whether a supervisor marks her on any given item of the scale. In most cases it will be possible for the teacher and the supervisor to agree. In practice, it has been found that in most cases the teacher's judgment of herself on a certain item anticipates the supervisor's judgment of her in that respect. Here is the precise point where most rating scales have failed to win respect and acceptance from teachers. The ordinary method of assigning values seems too arbitrary and devoid of considerations that apply to the situation. Not only does consideration of "suggestions" apply to the case, but the teacher knows just as certainly and just as definitely as anybody whether or not she needs suggestions, asks for suggestions, and uses those that are received. It becomes not only possible but certain that the teacher will improve steadily, and such improvement is evidence of the practical character of the plan.

The scale of values here proposed, it should also be stated, puts a high premium on originality and individuality on the part of the teacher. The teacher who needs no suggestions, but who assists others with suggestions, is here ranked highest. This puts the commendation where it should be—on self-development through observation and study. Such a scale of values will immediately silence the hitherto unanswerable objection to supervision, namely, that it crushes originality, destroys individuality, and cultivates mere imitation and sycophancy.

Choice of the items or qualities to be included in a scale is still an open matter. The correlations between certain teaching

qualities and efficiency are still too largely a matter of opinion and not sufficiently determined as of fact. In making such a choice of necessary qualities, Professor Rugg's scale and the scales proposed by other writers contain suggestions of the highest value.

It must not be overlooked that the proposed scale of values will place the supervisor in a different relation to his teachers. Mere arbitrary assignment of values is not to be compared with a scale based on "suggestions." The supervisor must know the best when he sees it, must allow full credit for work when he cannot suggest anything better, be able to give suggestions when asked, and must know what to suggest after observing an unsatisfactory school or class exercise. Mere condemnation upon authority will not meet the teacher's retort to the unfavorable opinion: "But he made no suggestions to me."

SUMMARY

The use of "suggestions" as the unit for the measurement of teaching qualities will appeal to teachers and will win their support because they can understand the procedure and will generally concur in the judgment; it will win the support of good supervisors because it puts them on their mettle, and because the supervisor's judgment can be made to agree with the teacher's on identical points; it will silence the objection that supervision destroys originality and makes teachers cheap imitators; and will develop harmony and unity between supervisors and teachers in place of the feeling of difference of interest which too frequently prevails. Its use will bring supervisors and teachers to the common point of view, to the like-mindedness which characterizes true democracy. In this community of interests the school directors and trustees can also participate, for the appearance of mystery and the air of the esoteric have been stripped from the work of the supervisor.